

I believe it would be an advantage for all parents of young children to have the general knowledge that little children normally have sexual interests, since then they would be less likely to hurt their own children by excessive horror or severity if they met with any open expression of these interests. One hears now and then of mothers who have treated their children as pariahs for some openly sexual behaviour of a kind that needed little more than common-sense in handling.¹ The attitude of parents and nurses to such behaviour will, of course, always be largely determined by their personal reactions ; but in part at least, it is affected by the general atmosphere of educated thought about such matters. In any particular case, the balance may be turned towards wisdom and understanding by the knowledge that the behaviour in question is not unheard-of in children who are normal and lovable and who grow up quite satisfactorily. The general sum of current knowledge does influence parental attitudes to some real extent, in this as in all other matters affecting early education.

Again, however, I may say here what I show more fully in later sections of the book—I do not mean to suggest that sexual or aggressive behaviour in young children should simply be *sanctioned* by their educators. There is no reason to doubt that children need our help against the internal anxiety which their sexual and aggressive wishes spontaneously engender. But the question of *how* we can best help the child is by no means so simple or so obvious as is often assumed. The one thing certain is that the common attitude of, on the one hand, denying that children have these wishes, and, on the other, treating the slightest outward expression of their existence with crushing severity (and, incidentally, always blaming

other people's children), is *not* the most desirable, A great many people somehow manage to say almost in the same breath that such things do not happen, and that they ought not to be allowed to happen. But this automatic policy of hushing up the facts, either with or without harsh treatment of the children who do not easily learn to hide them, is very far from being the most helpful. To prevent children forcibly

¹ In. a footnote to "The Mentally Unstable Child and its Needs" *Studies in Mental Inefficiency*, January 15th, 1921, Dr. Robert Hughes says: "I was informed a short time ago of a case in which a child of five had been diagnosed as a moral imbecile solely on account of a certain sex habit."